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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002550

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SUBJECT: GALAPAGOS NATIONAL PARK WORKERS CONTINUE TO STRIKE

REF: QUITO 002502

1. (U) Summary. On September 10, the Minister of the Environment (MOE) replaced the Galapagos National Park (GNP) Director. In protest, the employees of the GNP went on strike. The strike began peacefully and the strikers initially promised not to interrupt tourist operations if their demands were met. The MOE offered to address the wage concerns of the employees (putting up \$700,000 as a show of good faith) but has shown no willingness to budge on the strikers' demand for reinstatement of the previous GNP Director. The MOE offered to meet with strike leaders in Quito, but the strikers have rejected this offer, demanding that the MOE should come to the Galapagos. Strikers have now closed tourist visitor's centers on the islands. An international monitoring group is also calling for an international boycott on tourism to the Galapagos. President Gutierrez told the Ambassador on September 20 that he plans to appoint a new Undersecretary of the Environment for the Galapagos. End Summary.

#### The State of the Strike

2. (U) When the existing GNP Director was replaced on September 10, the roughly 300 employees of the GNP went on strike (RefTel), denouncing the instability created by the constant turnover of directors, demanding reinstatement of the previous director, and including some minor personnel issues in their list of demands. Some 225 of the 300 workers are currently employed without a contract and many have not been paid for over a month.

3. (U) The strike began peacefully, but the strikers have threatened to use more radical methods if their demands were not met. On September 15, they issued a bulletin stating that they would close all the tourist visitor's centers effective immediately, including the beloved tortoise-breeding park center. The strikers' bulletin also states that if the MOE continues to ignore their demands, they will cease collecting park entrance fees (\$100 for non-residents and \$6 for residents) and suspend control and monitoring of the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

4. (U) The MOE announced on September 19 that \$700,000 is available to satisfy some of the wage concerns of the GNP employees. It is unclear if this amount will be sufficient to pay for all the contract employees. However, the MOE adamantly refuses to go to the Galapagos to meet with strikers to discuss the strikers' demands about stability and reinstatement. The MOE made it clear at a United Nations Development Programme meeting on September 17 that "legal and institutional sovereignty" are primary concerns with respect to the Galapagos. The MOE also stated on September 19 that he will impose legal sanctions and other measures against the strikers. There was no indication what these sanctions would be or when he would impose them.

#### Call for Boycott on Tourism

5. (U) The Sea Shepherd Society, an international monitoring group, has called for an international boycott on tourism to the Galapagos. The goal is to pressure President Gutierrez and the MOE to resolve this issue and stabilize GNP leadership.

#### New GNP Director on the Job, Without Staff

6. (U) The new GNP Director is attempting to install himself in his office. Reportedly, he went to the GNP Director's main office in Santa Cruz but was turned away by the strikers. He then went to the GNP offices in San Cristobal, accompanied by the Governor, police and navy troops, and installed himself in that office. The office in San Cristobal is considerably smaller than the main office in Santa Cruz (about 30 employees). Despite being physically present in the office, he apparently has no supervisory control and is unable to execute his duties and responsibilities.

Ambassador Meets with Gutierrez

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17. (U) The Ambassador met with President Gutierrez on September 20 to discuss the Galapagos problem. Gutierrez said he was cancelling his attendance at the UNGA to resolve outstanding crises, including the Galapagos. Gutierrez said he might create a undersecretary position in the Ministry of the Environment to oversee the archipelago.

Comment

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18. (SBU) The MOE's \$700,000 wage offer will help, but the problem of park management stability and politicization of the park directorship will be harder to resolve. A member of the Guayaquil conservation sector said that strike leaders are trying to send a letter to U.N. Secretary Kofi Anan through back channels in order to embarrass Ecuador's representative at the 59th UNGA this week. We know Gutierrez will not attend the UNGA. It is difficult to see how the appointment of a new undersecretary would stabilize or depoliticize the park directorship.

KENNEY